

# building blocks



December 2006

The online newsletter of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority  
Vol. 2, Issue 5

## Hollywood's Holiday Gift to the Homeless

It was like all the stars, moon and planets came into perfect alignment. First, the state of Michigan kicked off its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness at the Michigan Homeless Summit in late October. A month later, MSHDA delivered its historic Baseline Data Report — a first-ever snapshot of Michigan's entire homeless population. Then, in December, as everyone is stopping to catch their collective breath and enjoy the holiday season, Hollywood has played Santa in a big way and delivered an unexpected and wonderful gift to the homeless in the form of a major motion picture called: "The Pursuit of Happyness."

"The Pursuit of Happyness," starring Will Smith, is the story of a loving, caring, working father, Chris Gardner — the 2005 Michigan Affordable Housing Conference's keynote speaker — and his 5-year-old son who were forced to sleep



**Photo:** Will Smith as Chris Gardner and his son Jaden Smith who plays Gardner's son Christopher. **Inset:** The real-life Chris Gardner from his appearance at the 2005 Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing.

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**"Everyone at the premier was on the same page in the fight to end homelessness."**

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in shelters, bus stations, public restrooms or wherever else they could find refuge for the night.

When Sony pictures made the Michigan State Housing Development Authority aware of the impending release of "The Pursuit of Happyness," MSHDA and its media partners went right to work offering those who serve the homeless, community leaders and local decision

makers an opportunity to play a supporting role in this compelling human drama by attending a series of sneak

previews at theaters in selected Michigan cities.

Sony Pictures sponsored events at theaters in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Flint — while Donovan & Smith Marketing and Media, Inc. underwrote a sneak preview event in Lansing.

At the Detroit screening, MSHDA Director Michael DeVos spoke of "preaching to the choir." To see so many people in the same room proudly singing the same song was a moving experience, said DeVos. "From local service organizations and state agencies, to members of the media and former homeless people, everyone at the premier was on the same page in the fight to end homelessness."

# Reflections: Holidays and the Homeless Summit

## Does It Get Any Better Than This?

**T**he holiday season, with all the good cheer and spirit of giving, started unusually early for me this year. And it had nothing at all to do with the commercial buildup that starts earlier and earlier every year either. It had to do with the powerful force created by the enthusiasm and passion displayed by hundreds in attendance at the first ever in Michigan Annual Homeless Summit.

"Does it get any better than this?" That was the question I asked myself many times during the Summit at the Lansing Center at the end of October. No matter how many times I tried to block the thought, it just kept popping into my head uninvited, and the answer was always the same. **"NO, it doesn't get any better."**

There is only one reason for this – YOU. And we can multiply that by more than 650 because that is how many of you came to Lansing armed with 60 creative and workable plans to end homelessness in Michigan within ten years. Those plans represent every single square mile of Michigan!

If that wasn't enough, among our special guests at the Summit was **Philip F. Mangano, Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness**. Though he travels throughout the country working with hundreds of organizations in their quests to end homelessness, he was truly impressed with Michigan's unprecedented efforts. I have known Phil Mangano for a number of years, working with him in many different venues, and he is not one to toss out compliments impulsively. Our work here in Michigan really moved him.

In addition to the ceremonial presentation and celebration of the completion of the individual community plans, as well as messages from several national and regional leaders, another milestone was announced during the

Summit: For the first time ever, a **Baseline Data Report** on the state of Michigan's Homeless was presented. This report is the result of a two-year process of establishing the technology and training to tabulate the homeless through points of entry in hundreds of locations across the state.

Though it represents just six month's worth of statewide data, the report is significant because it provides us the ability to understand who is homeless, what their needs are, and how many are located in each community.

Along with the Authority, the **Michigan Departments of Human Services, Community Health and Corrections** are also pledging their continued cooperation and support of this most important initiative.

Many of you may remember **Chris Gardner**, the central figure of a rags to riches story of a homeless man and his young son, who was our inspirational keynote speaker at the Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing two years ago. He was also the inspiration for the new movie **"The Pursuit of Happyness"** released by Sony Pictures. I am so pleased to hear that many of you jumped on the bandwagon when Sony offered a premiere showing in three Michigan cities – bringing along colleagues and community leaders to share in our statewide vision. This is another example of how you are tying into the **10-year Campaign to End Homelessness** and raising awareness of the issue for our local leaders and policy makers. What an opportunity it was, and you all rose to the occasion. I had the pleasure of attending the premiere in Detroit and it was, indeed, inspiring. For those of you who haven't had a chance to see the movie, I encourage you to do so.

The completed **Michigan Affordable**



**Housing Community Action Plan: A Five-Year Plan for Affordable Housing, Community Development, and Homelessness**, previously released in summary at the 2006 Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing, is finally available and I want to express my sincere gratitude for all the excellent work that has gone into this. Next year will be our implementation year, and I look forward to getting down in the trenches with you to set your plan in action.

As Governor Granholm's urban agenda continues in high gear, we are also ready to launch the **Cities of Promise** Web site in early 2007. Look for the Benton Harbor, Flint and Highland Park progress reports and success stories on-line first. Later we will post Detroit, Hamtramck, Muskegon Heights, Pontiac, and Saginaw stories of progress.

As with the Cities of Promise, the holiday season also reflects promise and hope in the hearts of all of us. May you open your home as well as your hearts to family and friends this holiday season, and whenever possible, extend a helping hand and hearty greetings of good will to those less fortunate than we are.

***It doesn't get any better than this!***

# MSHDA's Employer-Assisted Housing Program Goes Statewide

**T**he Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) program has been a successful MSHDA agenda for more than two years. What started as a local program has now blossomed into a statewide initiative.

The EAH program is a partnership plan, developed by MSHDA, which allows employers to provide financial and educational assistance to employees in order to purchase a home. The intention of the program is for the employer, and Michigan as a whole, to retain quality employees by giving them the chance to thrive in their respective neighborhoods.

Through EAH, MSHDA's Homeownership Counseling Network and Downpayment Assistance Program provide qualified participants with financial counseling as well as financing well below market rates. In addition, MSHDA matches the employee's assistance up to \$5,000 for those employees who decide to settle within the geographic preferences of the employer.

While this program has seen substantial success in the local market, MSHDA has decided to take the program statewide. There are currently eight statewide partners including Albion College, City of Lansing, Detroit Medical Center, Great Lakes Capital

Fund, Neogen, Niowave, Sparrow Hospital and Ford Hospital.

"There are many employers throughout the state that should have the opportunity to offer this incentive to their employees," said MSHDA director of Homeownership, Mary Townley. "By

opening this up to the entire state, we should be able to assist more potential buyers."

The financial issues facing Michigan, its employers and their employees are unique; yet this program provides the flexibility

and opportunity to work for and benefit everyone. The future of the program and the pending economic state is bright, and the possibilities brought about by this program can only lead to a healthier financial future.

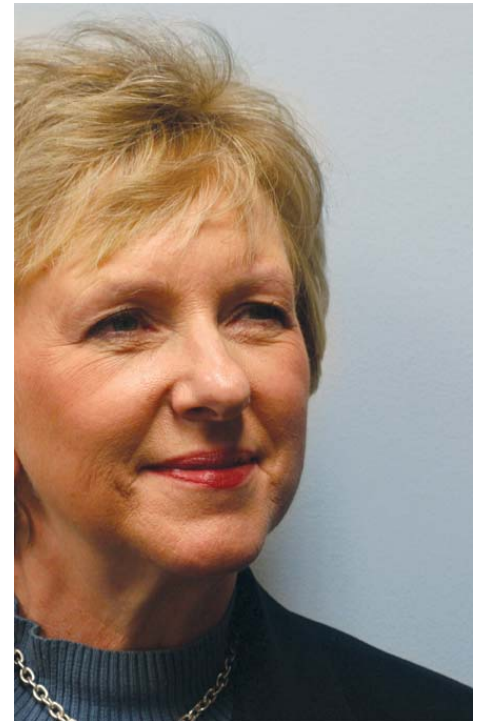
"I would like to see MSHDA provide education and assistance about this program to our lenders who, in turn, would market this program to their business clients as additional opportunities for client satisfaction," said Townley. "Partnering with our lenders will provide a win for all involved."

For more information regarding the Employer Assisted Housing Program or the statewide initiative, please contact Karen Lawson in MSHDA's Homeownership Division at (517) 373-2307 or lawsonk@michigan.gov.

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**DMC**  
DETROIT MEDICAL CENTER  
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Detroit Medical Center  
Human Resource Manager  
Peggie Schiller on...

## Employer Assisted Housing

*"When I am working on this program for our employees, I feel like a real dream maker. Everybody deserves the opportunity to invest in their own financial health through homeownership."*



# Help for the Homeless

## Vouchers Give Hope to Lansing Area Homeless

**V**olunteers of America (VOA) in Lansing hosted registration for the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program waiting list on November 29 with preference being given to homeless in the area. The HCV program funded by MSHDA provides federal rent subsidies to people with incomes at or below 50 percent of the county median income, adjusted for family size. Families assisted with an HCV must have adjusted incomes at or below 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Area homeless who signed up for the HCV program had to go through a three-step process which included: document and eligibility verification, application paperwork and a quality check area. Staff and volunteers were on hand to assist in all aspects of the process including serving a box lunch to all applicants.

MSHDA funds approximately 21,000 HCV's per year statewide. These vouchers assist Michigan's low- to moderate-income residents in gaining stable and secure living environments.

VOA welcomes over 1,200 homeless people per year including veterans, men, women and children. The shelter has separate men's and women's dormitories as well as a separate veteran's housing program which houses 18 veterans per night.

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Over 130 homeless mid-Michigan residents applied for HCV's at VOA. They will all be placed on the waiting list along with hundreds of other Michigan homeless and low-income residents. There are over 700 homeless in the

Lansing area on any given night, so signing up even a quarter of them for assistance is a big accomplishment.



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# Lansing City Rescue Mission Volunteer Program

There are approximately 50 MSHDA employees that volunteer at the Lansing City Rescue Mission, every first and third Friday of the month. In addition to their monthly commitment of serving lunches, they have expanded their efforts this holiday season to dedicating even more time assembling food and gift boxes for rescue mission recipients.

This generous commitment to the Lansing City Rescue Mission is due, in part, to the State of Michigan's policy of providing its employees with eight hours per year of school and community participation leave, which provides each employee with opportunity to volunteer their time for civic minded duties such as this.

This volunteer program by MSHDA employees got started primarily through the efforts of Sharon Evans of the Homeownership Division of MSHDA. Sharon had a brother, Steve, who struggled with alcoholism and was homeless at different times during his life. Steve spent time going through the program at the Lansing City Rescue Mission before passing away two years ago. After Steve's death, Sharon's family began volunteering by serving lunches, dinners, doing food pantry work and

putting together holiday boxes and gift bags for the homeless.

Coworkers of Sharon's at MSHDA became aware of the volunteer work she and her family were doing and expressed an interest in serving as volunteers. Sharon was anxious to have her coworkers serve and she realized "the homeless are someone's father, brother,

sister, mother ... and that many of them have families just like ours and deal with these struggles on a daily basis."

It was then that Sharon spoke with Jim Ruff, Associate Director of the Rescue Mission, about volunteer opportunities available. Jim provided Sharon with one Friday per month for MSHDA volunteers to serve lunches. Sharon filled

those slots within two days and went back to request an additional time slot. Jim provided Sharon with a second Friday per month.

In addition to lunches and gift bags, MSHDA volunteers work throughout the summer at concession stands at the Lansing Lugnuts stadium, helping to raise funds for the Lansing City Rescue Mission. The feeling among the volunteers is of being truly blessed with the opportunity to serve the Mission in this capacity.



Statistics on Homelessness from the Baseline Data Report:

## 50,692

is the projected homeless count in Michigan as of January 2006 through June 2006

## 56%

of actual homeless in Michigan are adults and children in families

## 1/3

of homeless families are working poor



## Affordable Assisted Living — State Agencies Helping Michigan Residents

Several state agencies are working together to assist Michigan residents. Collaboration between MSHDA, Department of Community Health (DCH), Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) and Department of Human Services (DHS) will work to create Affordable Assisted Living (AAL) programs for elderly Michigan residents. The development community was asked to submit a concept paper request to MSHDA. They received 24 proposals to compete for funds in new construction or retrofit of an existing property for AAL programs. The initiative seeks to fund an element within (or in close proximity to) a larger Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) campus. The AAL program will include an investment from MSHDA as well as a Medicaid Waiver Component.

The proposals will be scored and ranked by the above agencies on the following criteria:

- Proposal feasibility, Medicaid approved service providers and MSHDA affordability standards; these are threshold standards and must be met to compete.
- Development team capacity/competency in underwriting/site suitability.
- Partnerships created/impact on seniors' quality of life.
- Miscellaneous criteria including depth of income targeting, local contributions and proposal reliability.

Medicaid waiver eligibility will be determined by Single Points of Entry (SPEs) or identified waiver agents. Medicaid waiver recipients must meet health and income guidelines for eligibility. The SPEs are set up to help assist seniors to remain independent and in charge of decisions affecting their lives as long as possible.

"The AAL initiative is a great way to ensure that elderly Michigan residents are receiving the affordable living and health care that they require," said MSHDA Executive Director Michael DeVos. "The collaborative efforts of MSHDA, DCH, OSA and DHS will ensure the success of the AAL initiative for elderly Michigan residents."

A geographic component has been incorporated into the selection of the proposals. The selection committee aims to select at least one proposal in Detroit and at least one in a predominately rural area of the state. The selection committee will evaluate the proposals over the next few months and awarding of funds will be announced in early 2007. The goal is to distribute funding to at least six of the 24 proposal requests. Careful consideration will be taken to ensure that funding is distributed where it is needed most around the state.

## Downtown Revitalization Workshops

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority's (MSHDA) Community Assistance Team (CATeam) is pleased to announce it will be holding four Downtown Revitalizations Workshops in January 2007. These workshops will focus on the various programs and tools communities can use to revitalize their traditional downtowns and commercial districts. CATeam specialists will be on hand to answer questions and communities who have successfully used these programs will

be there to present their case studies. Additionally, the CATeam anticipates announcing new rounds for Michigan Main Street, Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns, Blueprints for Michigan's Neighborhoods, as well as the Signature Building and Facade Improvement programs.

The workshops are being provided at no costs to attendees. However, seating availability will be limited and attendees are accepted on a first come, first serve basis. For more information please contact the CATeam Office at (517) 241-1737

### Workshop Schedule

**January 9, 2007**

Clearview  
1100  
Howell, Michigan 48843

**January 11, 2007**

The B.O.B.  
20 Monroe Avenue, N.W.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

**January 16, 2007**

Wolverine-Dilworth Inn  
300 Water Street  
Bozoyne City, Michigan 49712

**January 18, 2007**

Best Western Franklin Square Inn  
820 Sheldon Avenue  
Houghton, Michigan 49931

**January 23, 2007**

Croswell Opera House  
129 E Maumee St  
Adrian, Michigan 49221



## Key To Own Helps First-Time Homeowner

Owni ng and maintaining a home on a low income is hard enough for most people, but for someone with mental impairments, it is even harder. David Gebhard is an autistic and mildly mentally impaired Michigan resident. After David's mother and caretaker passed away, he unknowingly lost his social security and disability benefits and was being financially exploited.

David's sister Germaine assisted him in getting his social security back and helped him apply for MSHDA's *Key To Own – Down payment Assistance* program and buy his first home. This

purchase gave David a stable and secure living environment, but most of all, gave him a boost in self-esteem and independence.

David and his sister are forever grateful for the assistance that MSHDA was able to give him in his quest for first-time homeownership.

"The people we worked with at the MSHDA *Key To Own* program were extremely helpful and responsive and understanding of my brother's situation," said Germaine. "They worked within our timeframe, which was a great relief to us."

Every Michigan resident deserves the opportunity to not only have a safe



David Gebhard

and secure place to live, but also the opportunity to own that place and forever call it home.

## Project Homeless Connect Set to Launch in January

Modeled after a successful outreach strategy created in San Francisco, Calif., Continuum of Care groups across Michigan are developing plans for local Project Homeless Connect programs in conjunction with the regularly scheduled statewide Point-In-Time count. The count, mandated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), attempts to gain an accurate picture of the homeless in Michigan including those that are not accounted for in shelters.

"Having a coordinated outreach effort like Project Homeless Connect will allow providers across the state to provide a one-stop service day for the homeless," said Michigan Coalition

Against Homelessness Director Lynn Nee. "This gives us an opportunity to not only streamline service delivery for homeless individuals and families, but also the chance to involve and educate our community leaders at the same time. The Coalition is pleased to be offering mini-grants to 13 communities to help cover some logistical costs for the Project Homeless Connect events."

Set against the backdrop of the statewide Campaign to End Homelessness, Project Homeless Connect is just one on-going outreach and engagement strategy among many that will help Michigan achieve its objective of ending homelessness within 10 years.

### Project Homeless Connect Activities

- One-stop service center for the day
- Free meal for the homeless
- Free health screenings
- Free dental services
- Free haircuts
- Access to communications
- Job fair, access to employers
- Access to housing
- Assistance with identification
- Assistance and access to available aid through Social Security, Department of Human Services, Veterans benefits

### Who Participates

- Service Providers
- Community Leaders
- Faith Community
- Community Volunteers
- Corporate Sponsors



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## Affordable Housing Conference Reminder:

The Michigan Conference on  
Affordable Housing is  
April 30 - May 2, 2007 at the  
Lansing Center

# Michigan Housing Locator

The Authority is proud to roll out  
the Michigan Housing Locator –  
a Web site

devoted exclusively to  
putting residents in  
touch with property  
owners who specialize  
in affordable housing.  
Donna McMillan led  
a team which included  
industry leaders as the  
Michigan Housing  
Council (MHC), the  
Property Managers  
Association of  
Michigan and  
RentLinx to ensure  
the success of the  
locator. A statewide

marketing plan is now being developed  
which will secure MSHDA's goal of  
having data on more than 500,000 units  
represented in the system.

Access to the Michigan Housing  
Locator website is free to both landlords  
and residents, and getting started is easy.

Landlords follow a simple 10 to 15  
minute set-up process, which involves  
entering all property details and  
amenities. An unlimited number of  
photos and floor plans may also be  
attached, as well as an application and  
lease. Interactive maps to property  
locations may also be posted. The  
Michigan Housing Locator Web site is  
available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,  
and can be updated at any time.  
Property owners and managers also have  
the ability to receive renter-inquiries

directly to their email accounts, easily  
identify both subsidized and market rate  
units and track statistics  
on visitors viewing their  
property listings.

The Michigan  
Housing Locator gives  
renters a full picture of  
the properties available  
in their price range, and  
will become the main  
source for Section 8  
Voucher holders to find  
out which landlords will  
accept their vouchers.

MSHDA has  
partnered with such  
industry leaders as the  
Michigan Housing

Council (MHC) and the Property  
Managers Association of Michigan  
(PMAM) to insure the success of the  
Michigan Housing Locator — and  
intends to market the Web site statewide.

“In today's highly competitive housing  
market, owners are looking for every  
resource to market their properties, and  
residents need a resource to find  
properties quickly,” says McMillan. The  
Michigan Housing Locator is that  
resource. For more information, visit:  
[www.michiganhousinglocator.com](http://www.michiganhousinglocator.com).

**“In today's highly  
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Sign up to receive Building Blocks via e-mail!

For more information, visit

[www.housingconference.org](http://www.housingconference.org)